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TAGS: [ELAB](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#)
SUBJECT: BURMA: ILO TO START CASH FOR WORK PROGRAM IN DELTA

REF: RANGOON 425

Classified By: Economic Officer Samantha A. Carl-Yoder for reasons 1.4
(b and d)

¶1. (C) Summary. International Labor Organization (ILO) officials plan to start a cash-for-work program by August to assist the most vulnerable populations affected by Cyclone Nargis. Under the program, the ILO will empower local residents in poverty-stricken villages to participate in infrastructure projects, such as building roads, bridges, and storm drains. The program has four main objectives: to train the Burmese on proper construction methods and other skills; to enable people to earn income; to develop infrastructure for long-term community development; and to encourage the growth of local markets and market linkages. The ILO will use this program to train the Burmese on best labor practices and educate them on their labor rights. According to ILO Liaison Officer Steve Marshall, the Minister of Labor tacitly approved the program, although the ILO continues to wait for the official approval from the Cabinet. Marshall expects the program to begin by August; the ILO will include in the UN's revised flash appeal a request for \$8.5 million for this program. End Summary.

ILO to Participate in Cyclone Recovery

¶2. (C) At the June ILO Conference, ILO Liaison Representative Steve Marshall petitioned the ILO Governing Body for permission to expand his office's limited mandate, which only covered forced labor, to include cyclone relief efforts (Reftel). The Governing Body approved Marshall's plan for a cash-for-work program in the Irrawaddy Delta, targeting vulnerable populations. Upon his return to Burma in mid-June, Marshall submitted his program proposal to the Ministry of Labor for approval. On June 27, Marshall received tacit approval from Minister of Labor Aung Gyi, although he still awaits final approval from the Cabinet. Aung Gyi told Marshall the Cabinet would review the proposal and make its decision by July 3.

13. (SBU) According to Marshall, the ILO's cash-for-work program would provide employment to vulnerable populations (unemployed farmers, fishermen, and day laborers), putting cash in their pockets so they can resume their livelihoods. People would receive a market-based salary of 2,000 kyat/day (\$1.81), which is above the average pre-cyclone wage. ILO projects would focus on infrastructure development - construction of roads, bridges, and storm drains - that would connect remote villages to larger cities and markets. The cyclone destroyed much of the limited infrastructure in the delta, and the GOB is interested in rebuilding roads, Marshall stated. Normally, these projects would be run by the local authorities, many of whom require local villagers to work without pay - a form of forced labor. The ILO program addresses the immediate need for roads, while preventing government use of forced labor, Marshall explained. He also noted that the ILO project would dovetail with UNDP's cash-for-work program, which will promote the recovery of 250 villages in the Irrawaddy Delta (to be reported septel).

14. (SBU) Marshall cited four main objectives of the ILO's cash-for-work program. First, it will provide vulnerable populations with jobs, enabling them to earn a salary and regain their livelihoods. Second, the ILO will provide workers with necessary training - how to properly construct and maintain a road, for example - giving them a skill that can be used in the future. Additionally, the project establishes rural road systems, which will be needed not only for future relief and recovery but for overall rural

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development. Finally, the ILO project will encourage the development and growth of local markets.

15. (C) In order to implement the program, the ILO plans to bring in five additional foreign staff - one project manager and four civil engineers. Marshall will also hire local Burmese to assist with project administration. Because of the logistical difficulties in traveling to the delta, the ILO will open a branch office in Patheingyi in August, effectively doubling its footprint in Burma. Marshall commented that the ILO satellite office will not only monitor the cash-for-work program, but will also accept forced labor complaints.

Promoting Best Labor Practices

16. (C) This program is an opportunity for the ILO to educate workers, local communities, and local authorities on best employment practices and labor rights, Marshall emphasized. The ILO will include in all trainings a segment on forced labor - a clear definition of forced labor, information about the ILO-GOB Supplementary Understanding on Forced Labor, and how to file a forced labor complaint with the ILO. Marshall and his team will also hand out Burmese-language copies of the Supplementary Understanding, as well as brochures explaining human rights and labor rights.

Seeking Funding Through the Flash Appeal

17. (C) Although the ILO does have potential donors for this program, the UN will include it in its July 10 revised flash appeal, Marshall stated. The total cost of the program is \$8.5 million for two years, which includes the cash payments, construction materials, tools, training materials, and support staff. Marshall noted that his office could implement the program by mid-July/early August, assuming he receives GOB approval by July 3.

Comment

18. (C) Burma has a long history of forced labor practices and

rumors, although unsubstantiated, abound about the use of forced labor in the delta after Cycle Nargis. The ILO's cash-for-work program will not only provide thousands of Burmese with the skills and opportunities to earn money, but also will educate them about their labor rights and best employment practices. This program will expand the ILO's scope of work in the country and will give Marshall and his team an opportunity to monitor first hand labor practices in the delta during cyclone recovery. We applaud Marshall's efforts to educate the Burmese about forced labor and the ILO's role to prevent forced labor. The more people know about their labor rights, the more likely they will be able to resist official demands for forced labor.

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